

VZCZCXRO0800
PP RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHIL #3199/01 2051204

ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 241204Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0635
INFO RUEHK/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2178
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7349
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1409
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 6797
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2937
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 1359
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2703
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHWSMRC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 003199

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, PART 1: POLITICAL PARTY PRIMER

REF: ISLAMABAD 1842

¶11. (SBU) Summary. Pakistan's multi-party parliamentary system includes large personality-based secular parties, regional nationalist/ethnic parties with limited appeal and surprisingly democratic religious parties. Party/personal loyalty and a spoils system count for more with voters than often non-existent party platforms. Illiterate workers often vote as directed by feudal landowners or factory owners in a politically moderate but religiously conservative Islamic society. Three key politicians lead their parties from exile in London, and few but the wealthy elite can afford to run for office. Despite institutional constraints, the constant activity of this alphabet soup of parties keeps Pakistan's political scene vibrant. This cable is the first in a series exploring Pakistan's political party landscape in the run-up to 2007/2008 parliamentary elections. End summary.

THE RULING COALITION

¶12. (U) The ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML), often referred to as PML-Q (Quaid-i-Azam), is President Musharraf's ruling party. The PML enjoys Pakistan's best brand-name in politics, since the country's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah led the original Muslim League. The PML controls 153 seats in the 342-seat National Assembly. PML president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and his cousin Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi are the main political actors within the party; and they help to maintain PML's strong support base in the Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province. There are several other smaller parties in the ruling coalition, including the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) and the Pakistan People's Party-Sherpao (PPP-S).

¶13. (SBU) Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM): A secular democratic party by its manifesto, the MQM is concentrated in Sindh and has been known for its violent past. The party's base remains the "mohajirs," those Pakistanis who migrated from India at partition, and their descendants. The MQM has 18 seats in the National Assembly. The party's founder, Altaf Hussain, lives in London, reportedly because he fears for his safety in Pakistan. Political violence on May 12 in Karachi has largely been blamed on the MQM and has tarnished its efforts to gain nation-wide appeal.

¶4. (U) Pakistan People's Party-Sherpao (PPP-S): Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao leads a small faction of the PPP that broke off from Benazir Bhutto's main party to join President Musharraf's coalition. The PPP-S holds only 2 seats in the National Assembly; however, Sherpao is highly influential in his native Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP).

THE OPPOSITION PARTIES

¶5. (U) Pakistan People's Party (PPP): The PPP was founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whose daughter Benazir inherited the party after Zia ul-Haq's regime executed her father. It is the most liberal of the national parties in Pakistan and has promoted both economic and social reforms. It remains centered around the personality of Benazir Bhutto, who has lived in self-imposed exile in London and Dubai since 1999. Bhutto faces corruption charges in Pakistan and abroad from her two previous terms as Prime Minister (1988-90, 1993-96). The PPP holds 55 seats in the National Assembly, which is over one-third of the opposition bench, and is overall the single most popular party in Pakistan. The PPP's stronghold remains in Sindh, but it also enjoys grassroots support nationwide.

¶6. (U) Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N): The Nawaz faction split from the PML after the Musharraf-led coup in 1999. Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shahbaz, both of whom divide their time between London and Saudi Arabia, lead the party. After the 1999 coup, the Pakistan Supreme Court found Nawaz guilty of corruption and Musharraf exiled him to Saudi Arabia until 2010. The PML-N holds 16 seats in the

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opposition. The July 2007 formation of a new All Parties Democratic Alliance effectively ended PML-N's uncomfortable alliance with the PPP. The PML-N has a support base among right-of-center Punjabis, especially those in medium-sized industrial cities.

¶7. (U) Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA): The MMA, a political alliance of six religious parties, has 66 seats in the National Assembly and thus holds the most seats in the opposition. It is the ruling party in the NWFP provincial assembly and is in the ruling coalition with the PML-Q in the Baluchistan provincial assembly. The two largest and most influential parties in the MMA are the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F). MMA president Qazi Hussain Ahmad also leads the JI and his party's support base is in the urban middle class. Maulana Fazlur Rehman is the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly and also leads the JUI-F. His party appeals mostly to Pashtuns in the NWFP and Baluchistan. The JI is a revivalist party similar to the Muslim Brotherhood and it appeals to a narrow sector of the educated, conservative middle class. The JUI-F is a more traditional Deobandi party that has far wider appeal to tribal conservatives.

¶8. (SBU) Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI): Led by former Pakistan cricket star, Imran Khan, PTI holds only one seat in the national assembly. Though a minor party, Khan's media-savvy opposition message endears him to many Pakistanis and expatriates. PTI - with little political capital of its own to lose - is a vocal supporter of the new opposition alliance with the PML-N and the MMA.

¶9. (U) The Nationalist Parties: The other smaller parties in the opposition include Pashtun nationalist parties: Awami National Party (ANP) and Pukhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP). There are several Baluch nationalist parties in the opposition: Baluch National Party (BNP), National Party (NP), and Jahmoori Watan Party (JWP). All the nationalist parties are secular and appeal to their regional and ethnic constituencies and feel disenfranchised by Punjabi-dominate national politics. All have minimal political power at the

national level.

PATTERSON